

11. REDLEGGED FALCON *FALCO VESPERTINUS* IN GUJARAT

Despite watching birds for over half a century, the sighting of a new bird is exciting. Perhaps, the excitement is all the more rewarding when one has almost exhausted most of the possibilities on one's home turf. On Friday, 2nd February, 1996 I added a female redlegged falcon to my list.

I was walking along the northern shoreline of the Poshitra Bay on Beyt island at the mouth of the Gulf of Kachchh. The sun was touching down on the western horizon in front of me when, what I took for a kestrel flew low over me. Since birds of prey are becoming rare and seeing one is a joy, I stopped to watch the bird, hoping it would hover. Instead, it glided low over me and alighted atop an euphorbia clump - the rays of the setting sun fully illuminating it. I immediately

realised that here was no familiar kestrel, the overall colour was much darker, the upper plumage was a dark grey. Unfortunately, I could not see the legs. The bird was smaller than the kestrel and from time to time gently bobbed its head. A couple of years earlier Pradeep Pandya, a knowledgeable birdwatcher from Rajkot, had recorded a small flock of this falcon in Saurashtra. February is too late for an outward migration to Africa and possibly a little early for the return passage, so it is possible that a few of these rather uncommon birds do winter along the coast.

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12. NESTING OF THE LESSER FLORICAN DURING THE SOUTHWEST MONSOON

To reproduce successfully, birds should do so when environmental conditions are most favourable (Earle 1981). Breeding seasons are, however, fixed for most species and the optimal time for nesting and therefore breeding success is determined by the presence of adequate cover for nesting and hiding the young, and the availability of adequate food. The optimal nesting period in a species would have also evolved to fall within the breeding season when adverse environment influences eg. snow storms or floods, are least likely.

The lesser florican *Sypheotides indica* breeds during the southwest monsoon (Jerdon 1864, Ali and Ripley 1969, Dharmakumarsinhji 1950), immigrating into western India at the onset of the monsoons and begins emigrating in early October (Sankaran 1991, Sankaran *et al.* 1992). Like all other species of bustards, the lesser florican is a ground nester. The nest in this family is a simple scrape in the ground without any nesting material added, and the behaviour associated with nest building is absent (Osborne *et al.* 1984).

Due to the nesting habitat, long grass, florican nests are very difficult to find, more so due to the secretive behaviour and cryptic coloration of the hens. Because this species is endangered, intensive nest searches were not undertaken, and nest location was mainly through chance flushing of incubating hens in the field; therefore data is limited

The majority of the data was collected at grasslands around Sailana in Ratlam district, Madhya Pradesh, and the rest at Rampura-Movalia-Kalitalai grasslands near Dohad in Panchmahal dist., Gujarat. The study extended over 475 days between July 16 and October 6, 1985; June 22 and October 10, 1986; June 16 and October 1, 1987; June 24 and October 6, 1988; August 5 and October 1, 1989. Six nests were located (2 in 1985 and 4 in 1986) at Sailana, and 3 nests were seen at the proposed Lala Bustard Sanctuary near Nalliya, Abhdasa Taluka, Kutch dist.

Clutch size & Incubation period: Of the 9 nests recorded in this study, one had five eggs,